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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a content analysis of 45 high fantasy novels randomly selected from the outstanding contemporary fantasy list in "Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults" (Ruth Nadelman Lynn), which divides high fantasy into three subgenres--travel to other worlds, alternate world/history, and myth. A comparison is made between male and female characters in each subgenre. Characteristics examined include personal traits and occupations and the roles played by female characters. Male characters were most often noted as having occupations. When occupations were specified for women, they were almost always positions that had inherently less political and/or magical power than men, regardless of subgenre. Women acting independently were found most often in alternate world/history fantasy, while the majority of females in both of the other two subgenres are defined by their relationship to male characters. A copy of the evaluation form and an annotated bibliography of the books analyzed are appended. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/MES)

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IMAGES OF WOMEN IN HIGH FANTASY FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
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by

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INTRODUCTION

The value of the fantasy genre to children and young adults has been the subject of much debate. Its critics often dismiss it out-of-hand as being "escapist," or fail to differentiate between fantasy as a psychological illness as opposed to a literary form. Fantasy's defenders feel that exposure to fantastic tales in childhood will later help children to recognize and value more sophisticated literary genres. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has investigated the therapeutic value of fantasy and fairy tales; these types of stories can often help children to deal with their anxieties and emotional conflicts. Natalie Babbitt, a prominent fantasy writer for young people calls fantasy "the most wrenching, depth-provoking kind of fiction available to our children[1]." She also notes that fantasy may be unique as a genre: readers can not only share a hero's (or heroine's) adventures and triumphs, but the story ends with a note of hope that things *can* be changed for the better.[2]

Fantasy, as with science fiction, has often been referred to as a "literature of possibilities." Its readers are challenged to see beyond what *is* and to envision what *could* be. These novels may appear, without careful examination, to have little to do with the everyday experiences of children. Yet, if one gets beyond the first layer of telling, the adventure, one will discover that there is a second layer to be found: a deeper level where questions are raised, and readers are prodded to reconsider the way things are. Tamora Pierce, author of the *Song of the Lioness*

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[1] Natalie Babbit, "The Purposes of Fantasy." In *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Children's Literature Association* (Ypsilanti, Mich: Children's Literature Association, 1983), 22.

[2] Babbitt, "The Purposes of Fantasy," 28.

series for young adults, says: "Young people are drawn to battles for a discernable higher good...Intelligent readers will come to relate the questions raised in these books to their own lives."[3]

Pierce also calls fantasy a "literature of empowerment."[4] Children often have little to say about the direction their lives will take. In fantasy, young readers can find role models that, despite overwhelming odds, find ways to take control of situations and affect personal outcomes. It is for this reason in particular that it is important that young girls be able to find strong, female protagonists in fantasy literature. Young girls are given many negative messages by the society we live in. Kathleen Odean, author of *Great Books for Girls*, states:

> Movies, television, magazines and popular music give short shrift to strong, active women and instead place enormous emphasis on women's looks and sexuality. Few females can reach the standard of beauty set by advertisements and the fashion industry, leaving teenage girls with a constant sense of failure. They are increasingly prone to depression and eating disorders, and are pressured to use drugs and alcohol.[5]

Many girls are pressured to fit this impossible or dangerous stereotype, with little information to the contrary. Books are one place where girls could potentially find alternatives or solutions, in heroes heroines that are strong enough to escape forced expectations.

As well as needing heroes, children need to have characters in their books that they can relate to. Children must be able, in some way, to see a part of themselves in a protagonist in order to have a successful relationship with a book. Yet gender alone does not constitute a foundation for

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[3] Tamora Pierce, "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It.," *School Library Journal* 39 (October 1993): 50.

[4] Pierce, "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It."51.

[5] Kathleen Odean, *"Great Books for Girls* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 2.

such a relationship. Girls need not only female characters, but need ones through whom they can vicariously experience accomplishments in circumstances paralleling some facet of their own.

Unfortunately, this is not easily come by. Over 4,000 new books are published each year for children and young adults, but only a small percentage of these offer this type of protagonist. Most that feature girls focus on relationships, friendships and family problems. Few are beginning quests that could conceivably affect more than their own personal sphere. Even fantasy has been accused of this lack. Susan Lehr, president of the Children's Literature Assembly and author of *Battling Dragons: Issues and Controversy in Children's Literature*, calls for a new image in children's fantasy and says of the present:

> Most of the imagery in this body of literature is created out of a world in which men rule and women must fight to find their voices, where identity for women has been achieved through the struggle against a male heritage.[1]

This being the case, these worlds are not unlike our own--dominated by men, where, even now, women are battling to find their unique voices. Yet, there is some dissent here: some claim that fantasy is one area that offers much in the way of gender-fair fiction for young people.[2] Are there characters that flourish in male-dominated fantasy settings, with characteristics that demonstrate individuality, independence and the breaking of stereotypes? Are there strong female role models to be found in fantasy literature for children and young adults?

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[1] Susan Lehr. *Battling Dragons: Issues and Controversy in Children's Literature* (Portsmouth,NH, Heinemann, 1995), 209.

[2] Linda A. Forrest, "Young Adult Fantasy and the Search for Gender-Fair Genres." *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 7 (Fall 1993): 38.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies applicable to the topic were found in the literature search performed for this content analysis. Charles A. Smith, Ph.D., says that stories for children are important, for they put real-life concepts into a dramatic context that young people can relate to. In *Wisdom to Wonder: Using Stories to Help Children Grow*, he examined over 250 picture books to categorize themes that affect children's self-worth and their relationships with others. He discovered eight major motifs in these works. These were:

- Becoming a goal-seeker
- Confronting challenges courageously
- Growing closer to others
- Coming to terms with loss and grief
- Offering kindness to others
- Preserving an openness to the world
- Become a social problem-solver
- Forming a positive self-image

Many of these elements can be found in not only in picture books, but in fantasy novels for children and young adults. Certainly Smith believes so, for of the four novels he recommends for older grade readers (eight year old and older), three are definitively of the fantasy genre. His extended bibliography lists many fairy tales as being useful for promoting these positive traits.

Linda A. Forrest notes that gender bias is prevalent in the educational system (as based upon

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the 1992 study by the American Association of University Women). For this reason, it is important to look closely at other factors that may influence gender bias, such as the books in young adult literature collections. She says that fantasy, in fact, may be one genre in which girls may avoid obvious stereotyping. To demonstrate this, she points to the works of authors such as Andre Norton, Elizabeth Moon, Robert Jordan, Ru Emerson and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Such books can not only help young adults appreciate fantasy as a genre, but can help promote a positive sense of self through role-modeling.

Hedy White, in 1986, examined 113 fiction titles for children and young adults to compare situations in which one character helped or influenced another.[8] She found that, regardless of context, females were more likely to be helped than to give help; whether that help was passive or active was irrelevant. Females were more often depicted as being dependent ("damsels in distress"), rather than independent, upholding currently held social stereotypes.

Carolyn Wendell conducted a study in 1980 of thirty-seven Nebula Award-winning novels (given for outstanding adult science fiction) and short stories written between 1965 and 1973 in which she placed female protagonists into six categories[9]:

1.) Women characters as nonexistent or peripheral (27%)
2.) Women as minor characters in stereotypical sex roles (16%)
3.) Women as major characters in stereotypical sex roles (24%)
4.) Women as major characters: the "protected child" (14%)
5.) Women as major characters: independent and intelligent (16%)
6.) Worlds with no sex roles (one book--3%)

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[8] Hedy White, "Damsels in Distress: Dependency Themes in Fiction for Children and Adolescents," *Adolescence* 82 (Summer 1986): 251-255.

[9] Carolyn Wendell, "The Alien Species: A Study of Women Characters in the Nebula Award Winners, 1965-1973," *Extrapolation* 20 (Winter 1979): 343-354.

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In this study, Wendell concluded that less than one-fifth of the female characters had both a major role and non-stereotypical characteristics. The vast majority (81%) of the works considered portrayed women as merely an adjunct to their male counterparts and/or demonstrated personal traits that put them in dependent or stereotypical roles.

Perhaps the most relevant previous study is that of Mary J. Du Mont.[10] Using Wendell's categories, Du Mont analyzed 45 science fiction and fantasy novels for young adults written in the past three decades. She discovered that the total number of female protagonists increased significantly (34%) from 1970 to 1990, but that males still outnumbered females. Additionally, men were still shown as more often being active as opposed to passive (only 11% were classified as being passive in 1970, to 14% in 1990), although women had improved significantly (45% in 1970, to 78% in 1990). Women were still more likely to be portrayed in stereotypical or less-skilled jobs by 1990, while men were almost never portrayed as homemakers, secretaries or clerks, or as any member of the non-professional health fields (nurses, hospital aides, etc.). Du Mont showed that women have, indeed, come a long way since 1970, but there is still not balance in gender roles in fantasy or science fiction for young adults.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of women as compared to men in fantasy novels for children and young adults. The research will analyze specified traits to determine if there is overall balance between strong female and male characters in heroic ("high") fantasy.

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[10] Mary J. Du Mont, "Images of Women in Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy, 1970, 1980 and 1990: A Comparative Content Analysis," *VOYA* 16 (Apr. '93): 11-15.

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DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

High fantasy--Also called "high" or "secondary world" fantasy. Any fantasy work which in some way include an imaginary land or world where magic is possible.

Alternate worlds &histories--Any high fantasy work in which the story takes place completely in a secondary (imaginary) world with no contact with our 'real' one.

Myth Fantasy--Fantasy stories which retell myth or legend, or in which contemporary protagonists are drawn into a struggle of good versus evil

Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy--Works of fantasy in which there is travel between our world and another.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This content analysis will be limited to the selections made at random from the "Outstanding Contemporary Fantasy" list (in Ruth Nadelman Lynn's fourth edition of *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*) and is limited to the three subgenera of high fantasy. The findings therefore cannot necessarily be used to generalize regarding other subgenera of fantasy.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a content analysis of forty-five fantasy novels for children and young adults, and its methodology will follow closely that of Du Mont. The books will be taken from the "Outstanding Contemporary Fantasy--High Fantasy" found in fourth edition of *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults.*[11] These are works that have been published from the

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[11] Ruth Nadelman Lynn, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography* 4th ed. (New Providence, RI. R.R. Bowker, 1995),. Lviii-lix.

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1960's to the present. Lynn has subdivided high fantasy into three categories: (1) alternate worlds or histories, (2) myth fantasy and (3) travel to other worlds.

The names of all titles will be written on separate slips of paper, and fifteen titles will be randomly drawn for each of the subgenera. Each book so chosen will be examined according to the specific characteristics and criteria using the evaluation form (see attached). Subgenera of high fantasy will then be compared by all characteristics to determine how women's roles are portrayed within each. Total number of characters, active and passive characters and occupations will al be compared by gender. Both male and female protagonists will be examined for personal qualities used most often to describe them. Female characters will also be analyzed for eight additional traits as put forth by Mary J. Du Mont, based upon the work of Carolyn Wendell. These traits are:

1.) Peripheral/nonexistent female character
2.) Passive victim/child needing protection
3.) Mythic woman/goddess figure
4.) Woman as purity
5.) Sex object/love interest (as main function)
6.) Unstable/emotional--liable to panic and create obstacles for hero
7.) Independent individual
8.) Other (to be specified)

It should be noted that the first six criteria classify women only in terms of how they relate to male characters, while the seventh classifies women as being independent of male characters. The eighth category ("Other") is to provide for incidences that may not fit the other criteria. Each character, both primary and secondary, will be examined for all of the above qualities as well as for personal characteristics.

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ANALYSIS OF DATA

It was not surprising to discover, as this study shows, that women are still a minority population in children's and young adults' fantasy literature. However, the roles that they play and the personality traits that these women have vary widely from subgenre to subgenre. It was found that these roles and traits were often fairly consistent within subgenres and could often be applied to the majority of female characters in those categories.

Going By the Numbers

In all three subgenres studied, there were more male characters than female—64% were male in the sample of Alternate World/History sample, 58% in Myth fantasy, and 57% in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy (see Figure 1). Although Alternate World/History fantasy contained the least female characters, these women are often seen in independent roles more often than women in either of the other subgenres (See Figure 5).

Figure 1.

Number of Characters by Sex

	Alternate World/History Fantasy	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy
Males	47 (64%)	53 (58%)	54 (57%)
Females	27 (36%)	39 (42%)	40 (43%)

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Beauty and the Beast

When one thinks of women in fantasy, one cannot help but bring to mind images of the beautiful princesses often found in traditional fairy tales. Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty are described as being lovely to look at in nearly every version of their stories. But, once having recalled these images, one must also remember that a prince (always nice-looking himself) rescues each of these heroines. These stories contribute to the stereotype that a beautiful woman is a helpless woman. The men in these types of stories are also handsome, but are nearly always portrayed as active individuals; not passive characters like their female counterparts.

This study found that women are still more often noted as being attractive as compared to men, regardless of what subgenre of heroic fantasy is examined. (See Figure 2a and 2b.) In Alternate World History fantasy, beauty is a defining trait for 25% of females as compared to only 6% of males. Travel to Other Worlds fantasy defines women by their beauty 30% of the time, while men are only so defined 7% of the time. In both these subgenres women are approximately four times more likely to be shown as beautiful than are men. In Myth Fantasy there is slightly more balance, with 31% of women as compared to 19% of men being defined by their attractiveness; women are only one and one-half times more likely to be defined this way.

It is important to note that beauty, in and of itself, is not necessarily a negative attribute when examining female characters. It is, however, necessary to achieve balance between the sexes. If an average of 29% of women is described as beautiful, so should

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an equal percentage of men. Otherwise, this inequality contributes to what psychologist Mary Pipher calls our "girl-poisoning culture"[11] Of this culture Kathleen Odean, author of *Great Books for Girls* says:

> Movies, television, magazines, and popular music give short shrift to strong, active women and instead place enormous emphasis on women's looks and sexuality. Few females can reach the standards of beauty set by advertisements and the fashion industry, leaving teenage girls with a constant sense of failure.[12]

Fairy tales have certainly created the impression that all females in fantasy fall at extremes: they are either stunningly beautiful, or they are hags. Certainly most children will not describe themselves as ugly, making those at this end of the spectrum unlikely candidates for close reader relationships. Females noted mostly for or only for their appearance fall at the other end and, while some readers may relate to them (and many girls wish to *be* them), these types of depictions only strengthen society's message that beauty is all-important.

While this study found that women are more often described as striking than men, the majority of women were *not* defined by their appearance at all. One can only assume that the majority is average looking, and/or appearance is not important to the role of these

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[11] Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York, Putnam, 1994):12
12 Odean, *Great Books for Girls*, 2.

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characters. It is probable that most readers themselves fit this description, and therefore these may potentially be the characters they best relate to. Robin McKinley's heroines Harry Crew (*The Blue Sword*) and Honour (*Beauty*) are not only *not* described as being beautiful, but are quite average (even gawky!); a state they not only comment on, but accept. Both of these young girls accomplish much, yet are not hindered by what one might see as a lack in a heroine. Honour, as the "Beauty" in McKinley's retelling of "Beauty and the Beast," makes it known that her nickname of "Beauty" is actually a joke stemming from her lack of it. Nevertheless, she is a capable individual, who finds the strength to break the magic spell over the Beast's castle and, in the end, wins the handsome prince (who, by the way, sits passively waiting for the right girl to save him and the castle). Harry may not be a gorgeous socialite, but she goes forth to become the foremost Lady Hero in Damar and leads a mostly-male army to conquer the evil forces of the North. Their adventures are not only excellent examples of what "average" women can do, but also help to erode the stereotype that effective women in fantasy *have* to be beautiful.

Character Traits

Beauty is not the only characteristic examined by this study (see Figures 2a and 2b); several other traits were considered in both male and female characters. Male characters nearly always outnumbered females in regards to intelligence as a primary trait. Thirty-four percent (34%) of males in Alternate World/History fantasy were described as being intelligent, while only 19% of females were. Myth fantasy was somewhat more equal,

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Figure 2a.

Male Character Traits

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy
Beauty	3 (6%)	10 (19%)	4 (7%)
Intelligence	16 (34%)	9 (17%)	4 (7%)
Physical Strength	8 (17%)	9 (17%)	5 (9%)
Wit	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	7 (13%)
Emotional Strength	3 (6%)	8 (15%)	8 (15%)
Athletic abilities	5 (11%)	6 (11%)	6 (11%)
Magical powers/intuitive abilities	12 (26%)	12 (23%)	22 (41%)
Other:			
Charisma	1 (2%)	---	--
Close-mindedness	2 (5%)	--	--
Cruelty	2 (5%)	--	--
Drug habit	1 (3%)	--	--
Greed	4 (7%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
Lack of stature	1 (2%)	--	--
Madness	1 (2%)	--	1 (2%)
Musical/artistic talent	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	--
Scheming	1 (2%)	--	1 (2%)
Spoiledness	1 (2%)	--	--
Stupidity	2 (5%)	--	--
Courage	--	2 (3%)	--
Kindness	--	4 (8%)	5 (9%)
Loyalty	--	1 (2%)	--
Leadership ability	--	1 (2%)	--
Conniving	--	--	1 (2%)
Controlling	--	--	1 (2%)
Non-communicative	--	--	2 (4%)

Note: Characters may be primarily defined by more than one (1) trait, so percentages will *not* necessarily add to 100%.

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Figure 2b.

Female Character Traits

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy
Beauty	7(25%)	12(31%)	11 (30)%
Intelligence	5 (19%)	5 (13%)	5 (13%)
Physical Strength	---	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Wit	3 (12%)	--	3 (8%)
Emotional Strength	10 (37%)	6 (15%)	7 (18%)
Athletic abilities	5 (19%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Magical powers/intuitive abilities	6 (19%)	10 (26%)	15 (38%)
Other:			
Cruelty	--	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Kindness	5 (18%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)
Motherliness	--	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Self-centered	--	1 (3%)	--
Stubbornness	--	1 (3%)	--
Ugliness	--	1 (3%)	--
Religious belief	--	1 (3%)	--
Sociability	1 (4%)	--	--
Close-mindedness	2 (8%)	--	--
Controlling	--	--	1 (3%)
Gossiping	--	--	1 (3%)
Greed	--	--	1 (3%)
Helplessness	--	--	1 (3%)
Obedience	--	--	2 (5%)
Jealousy	--	1 (3%)	--

Note: Characters may be primarily defined by more than one (1) trait, so percentages will *not* necessarily add to 100%.

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with a total of 17% of men and 13% of women depicted as such. Travel to Other Worlds fantasy was the exception, with 13% of females fitting this description and only 7% of males. It should be noted that even if a character is not primarily described as "intelligent," that does not necessarily signify that the character lacks this quality. It simply means that it is not regarded as his or her most noticeable feature. Intelligence, also, is not necessarily an indicator of educational level; formal education was rarely, if ever, specified in any of the books studied.

Wit is an attribute not often displayed by characters of either sex, but males always showed it more often than females. Both Alternate World/History and Travel to Other Worlds fantasy contain 13% of male characters that exhibit this characteristic; Myth fantasy only has 2%. Females are portrayed this way most often in Alternate World/History fantasy, with 12% of women possessing humor or wit. Myth fantasy contained none at all.

Physical strength is a feature most commonly associated, perhaps, with men, and this study found no evidence to the contrary. Virtually no females in any subgenre of high fantasy are notably strong: only one woman in each Myth and Travel to Other Worlds fantasy reveals this ability, and none whatsoever in Alternate World/History fantasy. Men, on the other hand, often showed significant numbers of physically strong characters. Alternate World/History fantasy contained the most, with 34% of male characters having physical strength as a primary traits, and Myth fantasy boasted 17%.. This inequality also was found in regards to athletic ability. With the exception of Alternate World/History fantasy (19% of women compared to 11% of men), males were

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more athletically inclined than their female counterparts. Although it may be accepted fact that men, overall, *are* stronger physically than women, it does not explain such an imbalance between the depictions of the two genres.

Emotional strength was most often observed in female characters. The largest gap between genders in this category was in that of Alternate World/History fantasy, where 37% of women possessed emotional strength, as compared to only 6% of men. The two sexes were nearly even in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy, where men were only slightly outnumbered by women (18% and 15%, respectively). Equality was found in Myth fantasy, where both men and women possessed emotional strength 15% of the time. Although emotional strength may often be perceived as a positive trait, it may also contribute to the notion that women are mostly "feeling," rather than "thinking." It would be more positive to create more male characters in order to even out this inequity.

Magical powers and intuitive abilities are features that help distinguish fantasy as a genre, and a good number of these books are peopled by characters with such talents. The discrepancy between men and women in this category varied a great deal from subgenre to subgenre. In Alternate World/History fantasy there were more men wielding such powers: 26% of them, while only 19% of their female counterparts do so. Men also come out ahead in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy, where 41% have supernatural abilities as compared to only 38% of women. It is in Myth fantasy that women are on top: 26% of them have magic or psychic powers, while 23% of men have them. This is perhaps somewhat logical, for it is in this particular subgenre that women are most often placed in the role of the "Mythic Woman" (see Figure 5).

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Not all characters were definitively described by any of the previous characteristics. The list of "other" traits (see Figures 1a and 1b) is varied for both sexes. No trait was common to both genders across all three subgenres. "Kindness" was the only quality found in common for women for all subgenres, while "Greed" appeared in all three subgenres for men. Interestingly enough, greedy women were virtually nonexistent, and very few men were defined by their kindness.

Women in Action (Or Not)

This study found a wide span between genres concerning the activity/passivity of both male and female characters (see Figure 3). Women were most often shown in passive roles in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy, with only 35% of females described in active ways. On the other hand, female characters actually *surpassed* males in Alternate World/History fantasy; 64% of women were active, as compared to only 53% of men. Although the two genders are depicted somewhat more evenly in Myth fantasy, 47% of men are active, as compared to 39% of women. Overall, male characters are still more active, with 56% as compared to the 36% of females.

To understand the divergence of these numbers, one might examine some other factors that may have produced it. In each of the three subgenres, female authors outnumber males. This is particularly true in the case of Alternate World/History fantasy, where twelve (12) of the fifteen (15) are women. This is also the subgenre in which female characters far exceed their male counterparts in activity. However, in Travel to Other

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Worlds fantasy, ten (10) authors are women and five (5) are males: it is in this subgenre that females are found most often in passive roles. In Myth fantasy there are also ten (10) authors who are women, yet the female characters of this subgenre are not even with and do not top males in activity. This being the case, it is unlikely that the gender of the author contributes significantly to the active/passive portrayals of females in high fantasy.

Perhaps, then, it is the natures of the subgenres themselves that lend themselves to one type of female character or another. Travel to Other Worlds fantasy nearly always involves a character or characters being transported from the world in which we live to some other and fantastic place. Those characters inevitably are products of the society in which we live, and will most likely carry that society's values with them. If those characters are females, it is probable that they carry the messages of our "girl-poisoning culture."[12] This message is conveyed especially in books. Kathy Odean says:

> Far too many books present boys as leaders and girls as followers. Boys go exploring, girls stick close to home. Boys take things apart, girls watch. Men are praised for accomplishments, women for being supportive.[13]

The findings of this study support this conclusion, for overall women are still most often described as passive characters, and this trend is particularly apparent in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy. In Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain*, Penny travels with her two brothers to a world where her two brothers have adventures throughout the story (her older brother Oliver even becomes a famous warrior) while Penny is often to

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12 Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, 12.
13 Odean, *Great Books for Girls*, 5.

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be seen crying from the cold, being carried by a man, or is a prisoner of the evil sorcerer Fendarl. Even though she is a help in overthrowing Fendarl, it is only by virtue of Penny having blue eyes, which are portents for his downfall. Although there are two other females in this book (both somewhat more active), it is Penny most characters will identify with, since she comes from 'our' world.

Alan Garner's *Elidor* sets a similar example. Helen travels to the land of Elidor with her three brothers, where they are each given a magical treasure to bring back and protect. Yet Helen does nothing that contributes to the story: her main function seems to be simply to be the token girl character, and she functions either as a mini-adult, worrying constantly about what the boys are doing, or she cries when situations become difficult. Cally, the female protagonist in Susan Cooper's *Seaward*, is drawn into a strange land with West, another boy from 'our' world. Both are traveling to the sea in search of parents that may no longer live. Along the way they are pursued by Taranis, a powerful sorceress who is the epitome of Death. Cally can often be found crying when the going gets rough, and is rescued by her male companion West several times. Both Helen and Cally are characters girl readers are likely to identify with because of their age and origin, but they do virtually nothing to initiate action in their respective stories. Many of the female characters in this subgenre can be characterized this way, and/or are merely peripheral, further contributing to negative stereotypes and enforcing the message that girls are weak and unimportant.

Alternate World/History fantasy does convey characters from one reality to another, but rather takes place in a single environment in which a character functions during their

entire existence. Many of these lands are *not* friendly to women. Ann McCaffrey's Half-Circle Sea Hold is the home of Menolly, a girl of incredible music ability; she is stifled, even hidden in shame, because girls cannot (as Menolly wishes to do) become Harpers. Yet Menolly overcomes this obstacle by running away to live Holdless (and in constant danger of being killed by Thread from the skies), where she can exercise her musical inclinations whenever she chooses. Alys, of Vivian Van Velde's *Dragon Bait*, lives in a world where girls cannot be craft apprentices and are easily convicted of witchcraft simply for being independent, or to accede to the avaricious desires of others. Even though she is so convicted and staked out as bait for a hungry dragon, she manages to get away and make the dragon her ally. Together, they work on getting revenge on the village which forsook her. Betsy James's *Long Night Dance* demonstrates the most misogynist society. In the village of Upslope, the best female protagonist Kat can hope for is a good arranged marriage and to become a famous housekeeper. Women are definitely second-class citizens, and a girl's role is only to serve her father. Inspired by the appearance of a mysterious Rigi man and the women she meets in the village of Downshore trying to save him, Kat learns that there are other ways of living and makes the choice to leave Upslope for more enlightened ways. While these worlds certainly do not depict men and women as equals, they are, in fantasy novels, producing strong female individuals. Their identities have, as Susan Lehr stated, "been achieved through the struggle against a male heritage."[14]

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14 Lehr, *Battling Dragons*, 209.

Figure 3.
Percentage of Active Characters

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy	Total Average
Males	53%	47%	69%	**56%**
Females	64%	39%	35%	**36%**

This type of fantasy offers readers many active females, as opposed to Travel to Other Worlds fantasy. Perhaps it is easier to do so since protagonists must only struggle with their current (and usually known) environment and it's associated values: not with two worlds and the values of each. Of the three subgenres of high fantasy, it is certainly the one that gives females active roles most often.

Women on the Job

Occupations for both men and women were not always specified in any way in some books, but there was still a wide gap between which gender is working and which isn't. Regardless of subgenre, this study found that male characters were most often noted as *having* an occupation; the highest "unemployment" rate was found in Alternate World/History fantasy (see Figures 4a and 4b) at 12%, as compared to that of women, an overwhelming 49% in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy. The lowest for women was still higher than the "unemployment" rate for men; in Alternate World/History fantasy women do not have an occupation 19% of the time.

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When an occupation *was* specified, men were usually found in positions that allowed them to exercise physical, magical or political power more often than women were. Wizards and other magic-users were far more likely to be male, particularly in Alternate World/History fantasy, where 17% of male characters fit this category, and no female character truly did. This same genre also produces the most male political leaders and royalty, at 26%, while women fill this role only 15% of the time. In all subgenres warriors were most often male, with the only approximate equality being found in Alternate World/History fantasy; 9% of males were warriors and 8% women. Yet, this same subgenre that most often places men in positions of power also has men performing the job of servant more so than women (14% vs. 12%, respectively). It has also created some of the strongest female characters to be found fantasy for children and young adults, such as Menolly (*Dragonsong*), Alys (*Dragon's Bait*) and Birle *(On Fortune's Wheel)*. Although many of the female protagonists in this subgenre do not hold any sort of power, they still are able to accomplish much.

Women warriors and knights can be found in all but Myth fantasy. No female protagonist in Myth fantasy exercises any type of physical power. However, they do appear as magic-users more than twice as often than do men in this subgenre. This seems only logical, since these stories are based upon retellings of myths or legends, and few women warriors have appeared in these tales of the mythic struggle between good and evil. It is, perhaps, more traditional to have a woman who can command magical powers than the might of a weapon. Although Myth fantasy contains no female warriors, it does contain the fewest female servants (3%).

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Figure 4a.

Female Characters by Occupation

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy
Political leaders/royalty	4 (15%)	6 (14%)	8 (15%)
Doctors/scientist	--	--	--
Religious figures	--	--	--
Wizards, psychics, etc.	--	4 (10%)	1 (3%)
Businesspeople	2 (8%)	1 (3%)	--
Farmers, herders, etc.	4 (14%)	4 (10%)	--
Warriors, military careers	2 (8%)	--	1 (3%)
Scholars	--	2 (5%)	--
Craftspeople	2 (8%)	--	1 (3%)
Artists	--	1 (3%)	--
Entertainers	1 (4%)	--	--
Servants	3 (12%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)
Homemakers	1 (4%)	1 (3%)	5 (13%)
None	5 (19%)	19 (49%)	18 (45%)
Other	1 (4%)	--	6 (15%)

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Figure 4b.
Male Characters by Occupation

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy
Political leaders/royalty	11 (26%)	10 (19%)	6 (11%)
Doctors/scientist	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	--
Religious figures	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	--
Wizards, psychics, etc.	7 (17%)	2 (4%)	8 (15%)
Businesspeople	--	2 (4%)	3 (5%)
Farmers, herders, etc.	1 (2%)	5 (9%)	--
Warriors, military careers	4 (9%)	5 (9%)	6 (11%)
Scholars	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	--
Craftspeople	1 (2%)	5 (9%)	--
Artists	--	--	--
Entertainers	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Servants	6 (14%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Homemakers	--	--	--
None	5 (12%)	12 (23%)	23 (43%)
Other	5 (12%)	4 (8%)	5 (9%)

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It is in Travel to Other Worlds fantasy that one will find the most depictions of females in homemaking or child care roles (13%). In no subgenre was a male ever portrayed in this type of occupation. It is interesting to note that this subgenre also contains the most passive female characters in comparison to the other two.

The most common occupation for both sexes in all three subgenres was that of royalty, nobility or political leader. This is not unexpected, since the majority of all of the books studied takes place in or involve a monarchy. Even if protagonists are not themselves royalty (but a good percentage of them are), they may be still of noble birth or become involved with an official of the monarchy during the course of the story. Some become members of royalty as part of the book. Mickle (in Lloyd Alexander's *Westmark*) discovers that she is, in fact, the missing Princess, nearly drowned by the King's Chief Minister, and had lost her memory. Some may be trying to topple a monarch from the throne, such as the evil Fendarl in Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain*. Fantasy based in the past, such as Elizabeth Marie Pope's *The Perilous Gard* and K.M Briggs *Kate Crackernuts* may have several characters of the noble class. These stories take place in times when this class was commonly known, and thus it is no surprise to find that each of them contains within it more than one such character.

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Roles Women Play

This study found no books that were completely devoid of female characters, although there was a fair number of books that only included them in a small (peripheral) capacity. Alternate World/History fantasy included the highest number of females that were peripheral to the story; this is particularly interesting, since this category also contains the fewest number of female characters (see Figure 1).

However, this same subgenre also contains the highest percentage of female characters, which can be defined as "independent individuals": an astounding 52% of these women are *not* defined by their relationship to men (see Figure 5). Although Alternate World/History fantasy has few females, those that do exist are generally either placed in a peripheral role, or are in the majority, cast as strong, autonomous characters.

This category also had the lowest number of incidents of women who fit into the "Mythic Woman/Goddess" role. Only four (4) females were portrayed this way; the numbers are much higher for Myth and Travel to Other Worlds fantasy: 26% and 25% respectively. "Mythic Women" are those that may not only have great powers, but generally are feared by male (and possibly female) characters in the story. The majority of women in Alternate World/History fantasy may be described as strong, but they are not feared. Alanna the Lioness, in Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* quartet is certainly powerful, in both physical and magical capacities. But she is not looked upon with trepidation; rather, she has many personal friends and admirers who learn that she is, indeed, a human person in spite of her abilities. In Elizabeth E. Wein's *The Winter Prince*, the character Morgause provides an excellent example of the "Mythic Woman."

She is an alternative version of Morgan Le Fay in this retelling of the Arthurian legend. Morgause wants to obtain the throne for her own son, and is not above discreetly poisoning Lleu, the heir, to get it. Nearly everyone in Artos' household is uneasy around her and Medraut, her son, lives in fear of her and remembers the torment she caused him as a child. Although she does not have true magical powers in this version, Morgause is still able to make others afraid of her.

The role of sex object/love interest was not played often by women in any of the three subgenres. Myth fantasy again rated highest, with 8% of females in this category; Alternate World/History fantasy rated next highest, with 4%. Travel to Other Worlds fantasy contained the least, with only 2%. However, this subgenre did contain the only book in which this role was given to the *only* female character in the story. John Christopher's *Fireball* is nearly devoid of women, with the exception of a peripheral character named Lavinia, the daughter of a Roman Christian of status. She is defined purely by her beautiful appearance, and she exists only as something for young Simon to dream about. She in no way truly affects the plot, except that Simon makes the decision not to sail for the New World with his American cousin Brad; Simon prefers to stay in Rome and court Lavinia. However, as soon as Simon discovers that she is already engaged, he literally runs to the harbor to catch the ship with Brad. Readers are never exposed to Lavinia the person, but rather only see her as an object to be obtained by Simon. Lavinia typifies this role for the other two subgenres as well. Both Alternate

World/History and Myth fantasy have women who exist only because a man desires them.

There were few women who could be defined as "obstacles": those that tend to panic or display extreme emotions that somehow hinder the progress of other characters. Myth fantasy contained the most, with 5%, followed by Travel to Other Worlds fantasy with 3%. Alternate World/History fantasy contained none at all. Jean, a protagonist in Penelope Farmer's *Castle of Bone* (Myth fantasy), tends to get upset and/or cry when situations get tough, such as when Penn is transformed into a baby. Her outbursts do nothing but cause Hugh and Penn's sister stress, and also contribute to the image of women as helpless beings. Many authors of children's and young adults' fantasy literature, fortunately, are *not* employing this stereotype.

Perhaps a better known stereotype is that of females as passive victims or as a child-like figure needing protection. Certainly, this is where many of fairy tale's damsels-in-distress would fall. Alternate World/History fantasy was found to have only 4% of such female characters, while Travel to Other Worlds fantasy had four times as many, with 20%; Myth fantasy was slightly lower, with 15% of female characters fulfilling this particular role. These women and girls do not instigate events, but rather are merely affected by them. Winnie Foster, in Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting*, is controlled by her family, kidnapped and then cared for by the Tucks, and Angus Tuck must explain the reason for keeping the immortality spring secret very thoroughly; Winnie does not seem

to think for herself. The latter statement also applies to Katherine, in K.M. Brigg's *Kate Crackernuts*: she always has to be protected by her stepsister Kate from her jealous stepmother, and Katherine shows no ability to fend or think for herself. In Robin McKinley's *Beauty*, Beauty's sister Grace waits for her lover (who is lost at sea) for six years, mourning and withering away, rather than searching for new possibilities.

Such characters as Katherine, Winnie and Grace may be passive and add to negative images of women, but not every female character can be (or even necessarily *should* be) strong. Just as the world holds people of every kind, so do books. What is important is that such characters should be the exception, rather than the rule.

Figure 5.

Roles of Women

	Alternate Worlds & Histories	Myth Fantasy	Travel to Other Worlds Fantasy	Total Average
Peripheral/non-existent	11 (40%)	10 (26%)	6 (15%)	
Passive victim/child needing protection	--	6 (15%)	8 (20%)	
Mythic woman/Goddess	1 (4%)	10 (26%)	10 (25%)	
Purity	--	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	
Sex object/love interest	1 (4%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)	
Unstable/emotional	--	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	
Independent individual	14 (52%)	6 (15%)	11 (28%)	
Other	--	--	--	

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

High fantasy for children and young adults has a wide array of personal traits that appear in its female characters. The strongest female protagonists are most likely to be found in the subgenre of Alternate World/History fantasy. Independent women are found in the majority of the novels in this category; additionally, the remaining women are rarely found in "weaker" roles such as a sex object or passive victim. These females are also more likely to take active roles in the process of a story although, on average, women are more passive than men in high fantasy. Women in this subgenre are also more likely to hold political powers or be members of royalty than are men.

Travel to Other Worlds fantasy may contain a fair percentage of independent individuals (second only to Alternate World/History in high fantasy), but it also rates highest in the number of passive characters. Myth fantasy is only slightly higher in active women: both subgenre are far outstripped by Alternate World/History fantasy. That, however, is not to say that there are not outstanding examples of strong female role models in these two subgenres. Beth Hiltgartener's *Colors of the Dreamweaver's Loom* ("Travel to Other Worlds" fantasy) has several female characters, nearly all of whom are active, not defined by beauty, and are classified as independent individuals. Dahlov Ipcar's *Queen of Spells* is a fantasy in the "Myth" subgenre that is based strongly on the Scottish legend of Tam Linn. Janet, the protagonist, does not let her overly-pious mother or even the awesome magic of the Fairy Queen influence her decisions or lessen her

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determination to free her lover Thomas Lynn. Simply because the majority of a subgenre's works are dominated by weak role models does not necessarily mean that there are not any appropriate choices for young, female readers.

It is inevitable that some books will reflect the negative messages of the culture in which they are written, resulting in stereotypical characters that only serve to reinforce those messages. Books may also reflect truths about the society in which they are written. Certainly it is true that some women may exhibit what may be considered stereotypical qualities. Fantasy should not necessarily strive to eliminate every such woman or each such quality in them. Rather, fantasy should give female readers substantial female characters to which those readers can not only relate, but which convey meaningful messages about what those readers *can* be, not what they *should* be.

It would be interesting, as a topic of further study, to examine other subgenres of fantasy (such as ghost fantasy, humor fantasy, etc.) to see how their female characters compare to those found in high fantasy. It would also be beneficial to analyze the qualities of males versus those of males in other fantasy genres, to discover if perhaps women fare better overall in their portrayal and/or numbers. Fantasy has a great deal to offer young readers, but it would offer more if gender roles were balanced.

Evaluation Form

Book Title:_____

Author:_____

Publisher:_____

Date of Publication:_____

Character's Name:_____

Is the character: a) male b)female

Occupation:_____

Is he/she most often characterized as: a) passive b) active

What qualities are the most often used to describe the character?

a) Physical beauty
b) Intelligence
c) Wit
d) Strength (physical)
e) Strength (emotional)
f) Athletic ability
g) Intuitive abilities/supernatural powers
h) Other (specify)_____

Characterize each female character in one category:

I. Peripheral nonexistent
II. Passive victim child needing protection
III. Mythic woman goddess figure
VI. Woman as Purity
V. Sex object/love interest (as main function)
VI. Unstable/emotional—liable to panic
VII. Independent individual
VIII. Other (specify)_____

Comments about this character:

Book annotation:

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High Fantasy and Subgenre Bibliography

Travel to Other Worlds

Alexander, Lloyd. ***The First Two Lives of Lukas-Kasha.*** **Dutton, 1978.**

Lucas, a somewhat lazy apprentice, volunteers for a magic act and is transported to the realm of Abadan, where he is immediately hailed as the new King. As soon as he tries to exercise his royal power beyond obtaining the pleasures available to a king, Lucas becomes the target of the Grand Vizier's political greed and ambition.

Chant, Joy. ***Red Moon and Black Mountain: The End of the House of Kendreth.*** **Ballantine, 1970.**

Oliver, Penny and Nick Powell are summoned by magic to the land of Vandarei, where Oliver becomes a renowned member of a warrior band, and Nick and Penny meet the princess In'serinna, who possesses many mysterious powers. All strive for the overthrow the evil power and rule of the sorcerer Fendarl. Oliver has all but forgotten his Earthly roots, and now, as the warrior known as Li'vanh, "The Crowned Victor," he alone has any chance of facing down the hellish Fendarl.

Christopher, John. ***Fireball.*** **Dutton, 1981.**

British Simon and his American cousin Brad are sent to a parallel Earth by means of a strange fireball. Simon becomes an enslaved gladiator, whereas Brad is able to escape slavery and make connections with the Christian elite. Both help the Christians to revolt against their Roman rulers, and then escape on a ship bound for the New World.

Cooper, Susan. ***Seaward.*** **Macmillan, 1983.**

Cally and West are from different parts of the world and have never known each other. But both are transported to a strange world, where they find that they are somehow connected to it to and to each other as they travel to the sea, in search of parents that may no longer be alive.

Dalton, Annie. ***Out of the Ordinary.*** **Harper and Row, 1988.**

Fifteen-year-old Molly lives in a chaotic household with a mother who takes in every stray animal and needy foster child. Now, because Molly has the ability to hear and see things others cannot, she must care for and protect the young boy Floris whose enemies from another world are trying to destroy him.

Duane, Diane. ***So You Want to Be a Wizard.*** **Delacorte, 1983.**

Nita becomes a novice wizard after finding a strange book in the public library. She meets Kit, another novice, and together they enter an alternate Manhattan where they must battle evil animate machines and find the powers of darkness that are destroying the world.

Ende, Michael. ***The Neverending Story.*** **Doubleday, 1983.**

Bastian is an overweight, unpopular boy picked on by bullies. After stealing the book *The Neverending Story* in an odd used bookshop, he reads it in the attic of his school, only to become so absorbed by it that he himself enters the book and saves the magical land therein.

Fisk, Pauline. ***Midnight Blue.*** **Lion, 1990.**

Bonnie and her inept mother believe they have escaped the influence of hateful Grandbag (Bonnie's grandmother), only to have her move in with them. Bonnie, in order to get away, hijacks her neighbor's hot air balloon, which transports her to a different and strange world that is an alternate of her own.

Garner, Alan. ***Elidor.*** **Dell, 1965.**

Four children, exploring the slums of Manchester, stumble into the ruined but magical land of Elidor, where they are given four treasures to take back and guard in their own world. But evil forces constantly threaten to break into their own world, and the children must finally find a way to make the unicorn Findhorn sing, in order to save themselves and Elidor.

Hilgartener, Beth. ***Colors in the Dreamweaver's Loom.*** **Houghton, 1989.**

After her father's funeral, Zan gets lost in the woods, only to find herself in another world where she must learn a new language and new ways. She becomes the representative of the Orathi tribe that adopts her, and must find a way to save their lands from a scheming neighboring country.

Jones, Diana Wynne. ***The Lives of Christopher Chant.*** **Greenwillow, 1988.**

Young Christopher Chant is in training to become the next Crestomanci (head magician) of the world, because he has dreams so realistic he can travel to other dimensions and he has nine lives as well. He becomes a key figure in battle against renegade wizards, including his beloved Uncle Ralph.

Le Guin, Ursula K. ***The Beginning Place.*** **Harper, 1980.**

Both Irene and Hugh are 'going nowhere' with their lives; Hugh is a grocery checker and Irene is a courier. Both, however, have found refuge on the edge where our world meets another; where there is welcoming and peace from one's worries. While Irene resents Hugh's intrusions into "her" place, they must go together to destroy an evil beast.

Mahy, Margaret. ***Dangerous Spaces.*** **Viking, 1991.**

After the deaths of her parents, Anthea is sent to live in the disordered home of her cousin Flora. There, she becomes entwined in the dreamworld of Viridian, where the ghost of her great-uncle tries to persuade her to follow him to the "journey beyond."

Pope, Elizabeth Marie. ***The Perilous Gard.*** **Houghton, 1974.**

After being unfairly accused of something she didn't do, Kate is sent to the remote castle called the Perilous Gard. There, she discovers a centuries-old spell, a mystery of a missing child, and is enslaved by the Fairy Folk .

Winthrop, Elizabeth. ***The Castle in the Attic.*** **Holiday 1985.**

When Mrs. Phillips, William's nursemaid, tells him that she is returning to her British homeland, William uses a magical talisman to shrink her and himself small enough to fit inside the toy castle she has given him. But in order to restore them both, he must undertake a dangerous quest in the world outside the castle.

Myth Fantasy

Alexander, Lloyd. ***The Book of Three.*** **Holt, 1964.**

In the first book of the Prydain Chronicles, a young Assistant Pig Keeper named Taran, a feisty princess named Eilonwy and the warrior Prince Gwydion set out to find the lost Oracular pig Hen Wen, and to battle the evil Horned King.

Babbitt, Natalie. ***Tuck Everlasting.*** **Farrar, 1975.**

Winnie Foster, an overprotected little girl, one day decides to venture beyond her fenced yard. There, in the woods, she discoverers the long-held secret of the Tuck family—the spring whose water gives eternal life. But she is not the only one to learn of this, and Winnie must help her new friends from the scheming stranger who now threatens them.

Briggs, K.M. ***Kate Crackernuts.*** **Greenwillow, 1980.**

Kate's new stepsister, Katherine, is the apple of her father's eye and seems to have many things Kate herself does not, such as beauty and education. This does nothing to impede their forming of a strong friendship, but causes Kate's mother, a witch, to become jealous. Kate must try to protect Katherine from her mother's wrath in this retelling of a Scottish folktale.

Dunlop, Eileen. ***Clementina.*** **Holiday, 1987.**

Daisy is forced to spend her vacation on a Scottish estate with the strange girl Clementina, but finds herself bewildered by the terrifying things Clementina knows about a young woman who lived there in the eighteenth century and about the mysterious death of her lover.

Farmer, Penelope. ***A Castle of Bone.*** **Atheneum, 1972.**

Hugh's mother complains that his clothes are always on the floor, so a new cupboard is bought for him to put them in. Hugh, his sister and their two friends discover that anything put into the cupboard becomes a younger or former version of itself. After his friend Penn is accidentally pushed into the cupboard, Penn becomes a baby. Now Hugh must find a way to restore him before their parents find out.

Gardner, John. ***Grendel.*** **Knopf, 1971.**

This version of the Anglo-Saxon legend is told from the perspective of the monster Grendel, the terror that King Beowulf must destroy. While Grendel does go on bloody rampages to the King's hall, he also questions his existence and purpose on earth.

Hunter, Mollie. ***A Stranger Came Ashore.*** **Harper, 1975.**

Only Robbie suspects that the "shipwrecked" stranger Finn Learson, now living with his family, is actually the Great Selkie, come to woo and carry off his beautiful, unsuspecting sister to his kingdom at the bottom of the sea. In order to save her, Robbie must enlist the aid of the schoolteacher Yarl Corbie, who has suffered at the hands of the Great Selkie.

Ipcar, Dahlov. ***The Queen of Spells.*** **Viking, 1973.**

In this retelling of the story of Tam Lin, the setting is not the British Isles, but the American frontier. Free-spirited Janet must save her lover Tom Linn from the powers of the Green World, but cannot do so until Halloween night.

Lively, Penelope. ***The Wild Hunt of the Ghost Hounds.*** **Dutton, 1972.**

Lucy Clough, visiting her botanist aunt for the summer, feels that there is something frightening about the revival of the Horn Dance being done to bring tourists to the sleepy village of Hagworthy. The dancers seem to become something not human, something evil. Somehow this is a danger to her new friend Kester, and she must somehow stop the performance of the Horn Dance.

McKinley, Robin. ***Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast.*** **Harper, 1978.**

In this version of the classical story "Beauty and the Beast," Beauty is not beautiful, but in fact a somewhat gawky but sensible girl who loves books and horses. She goes to live with the Beast in his enchanted castle in order to save her father, but must find her way to break the spell over both Beast and castle before it is too late.

Mayne, William. ***Earthfasts.*** **Dutton, 1967.**

Keith and David find the drummer boy, Nellie Jack John, who has emerged from a mound two hundred years after he went in, searching for King Arthur. This is only the beginning of the strange events that now surround the town; a wild boar is loose, huge footprints are found, and the white candle Nellie brought out from inside the mound never goes out.

Serraillier, Ian. ***The Challenge of the Green Knight.*** **Walck, 1976.**

A giant green knight comes to Camelot and challenges the knights there to behead him, in exchange for the same blow from himself a year later. Gawain accepts this challenge, and goes on a quest for the Green Knight to fufill his vow.

Wein, Elizabeth E. ***The Winter Prince.*** **Macmillan, 1993.**

This Arthurian story is told from the viewpoint of Medraut, Artos' eldest (but illegitimate) son. He both loves and hates his younger stepbrother Lleu, and must protect him from the schemings of Medraut's mother Morgause, who is also the sister of Artos.

Wrightson, Patricia. ***Balyet.*** **Macmillan, 1989.**

Jo, a rebellious Australian girl, stows away in Granny Willet's car. Once in the outback, she ignores Granny's warnings to keep away from the perilous aboriginal spirit Balyet, who a thousand years earlier had been exiled from her tribe.

Alternate Worlds or Histories Fantasy

Alexander, Lloyd. ***Westmark.*** **Dutton, 1981.**

Theo, while fleeing the law, meets up with a con man and his assistant, and throws his lot in with them. Along the way he also meets Mickle, an urchin girl with a rare talent for ventriloquism and mimicry. Together they travel to the land of Westmark, where the king is mourning the loss of his daughter and his Prime Minister is plotting to take over the kingdom.

Beagle, Peter. ***The Last Unicorn.*** **Viking, 1968.**

The last unicorn in the world leaves her forest glade to search for the others of her kind, who are rumored to be captive of King Haggard and his Red Bull. With the help of Schmendrick, an incompetent magician, and the kind-hearted Molly Grue, the unicorn enters the castle of King Haggard in human guise to find her lost fellows.

Fleischman, Sid. ***The Whipping Boy.*** **Greenwillow, 1986.**

Just as Jemmy, Prince Brat's whipping boy, has had enough, the spoiled Prince decides to run away from home and take Jemmy with him. But when inept outlaws capture them, their roles are reversed and Prince Brat must depend on Jemmy for rescue.

James, Betsy. ***The Long Night Dance.*** **Dutton, 1989.**

Kat lives in a society where women can only aspire to be perfect housekeepers, but she yearns for something more. Her opportunity comes when a Rigi, a man from a race of seal-people, is washed up on her shore. To help him, Kat must not only leave her village to seek help, but must in turn confront her controlling father and then herself.

Le Guin, Ursula K. ***A Wizard of Earthsea.*** **Parnassus, 1968.**

Ged, a young magician, accidentally conjures up a terrifying spirit that threatens not only himself but also the entire world of Earthsea. While he studies on the magical isle of Roke he is safe, but once he attains his mastery he must leave Roke and stop the dark being before it consumes him.

Levin, Betty. ***The Ice Bear.*** **Greenwillow, 1986.**

Wat, the young assistant of the bakerwoman, helps Kalia and her white bear cub escape the usurper lord Uris, after Uris orders the bear's mother and Kalia's father hanged.

McCaffrey, Anne. ***Dragonsong.*** **Macmillan, 1976.**

Menolly, the youngest daughter of Sea Holder Yanus, is told she cannot become a Harper because she is "merely" a girl. Deprived of music, the one thing that makes her happy, Menolly runs away and lives in a cave where she Impresses nine fire lizards.

McKinley, Robin. ***The Blue Sword.*** **Greenwillow, 1982.**

When Harry Crewe is kidnapped by Corlath, the King of the Hillfolk, she doesn't know why, and neither does Corlath. Slowly, both begin to realize that Harry has powers and abilities which may be able to help her save the Hillfolk and her own Outlanders from the sinister masses of the Northern armies. With the help of much hard training and of the Blue Sword "Gonturan," Harry becomes known as "Harimad-Sol," or "Lady Hero."

Norton, Andre. ***The Crystal Gryphon.*** **Atheneum, 1972.**

Kerovan, the eldest (but deformed) son of the ruler of Ulm and his arranged bride Josian, have never met, even though they have been officially engaged for over eight years. Yet, when they do meet, it is while their homeland is being invaded by vicious forces which no one can seem to stop. Both must face the unknown and their own fears before they can know each other at last.

Pierce, Tamora. ***Wild Magic.*** **Macmillan, 1992.**

Daine has a mysterious power to not only talk to, but to heal and command animals of nearly every sort. It is this ability that brings her to meet Queen Thayet, the King's Champion Alanna, and the sorcerer Numair, and with their help and the aid of her animal allies she fights to save the kingdom of Tortall from magical invaders.

Van Velde, Vivian. ***Dragon Bait.*** **Harcourt, 1992.**

Alys is wrongly accused of witchcraft by villagers who want her father's shop. She is left as a sacrifice for a dragon, who turns out to be an ally rather than an enemy. Together, the two of them take revenge on those who accused her.

Voigt, Cynthia. ***On Fortune's Wheel.*** **Macmillan, 1990.**

Birle, faced with the prospect of a marriage to a man she does not really love, follows a young runaway earl, falling in love with him. Together they travel, only to fall into slavery in the city of a cruel prince.

Yolen, Jane. ***Dragon's Blood.*** **Delacorte, 1982.**

Jakkin, a young bonder, steals a dragon's egg from his master's nursery keeping the dragon in an oasis milesway. Jakkin works hard to train him for the fighting pits, where a prize fighter could fill Jakkin's bonder bag and in turn buy him his freedom.

Zettner, Pat. ***The Shadow Warrior.*** **Macmillan, 1990.**

Llyndreth seeks her brother, missing since he went off to fight goblins, and along the way encounters Angborn, the last Eodan giant, and the wounded goblin Zorn. Although she and Zorn are enemies, they come to learn that each has much to offer the other.

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ABSTRACT

A content analysis of forty-five (45) high fantasy novels randomly selected from the Outstanding Contemporary Fantasy list in Ruth Nadelman Lynn's *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults* (4th edition). Lynn divides high fantasy into three subgenres ("Travel to Other Worlds," "Alternate World/History" and "Myth."). A comparison is made between male and female characters in each subgenre. Characteristics examined include personal traits and occupations, and the roles played by female characters. Male characters were most often noted as having occupations. When occupations were specified for women, they were almost always positions that had inherently less political and/or magical power than men, regardless of subgenre. Women acting independently were found most often in "Alternate World/History" fantasy, while the majority of females in both of the other two subgenres are defined by their relationship to male characters.

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